

With Eagles Wings

Written by Bob Stone

Proverbs 30:18; Job 39:27-28; Exodus 19:4; Deut. 32:11; Isaiah 40:30-31

I want to take a break from the way I usually teach and simply reflect on eagles. I am fascinated by eagles, even though there is much about them I don't understand. I have had encounters with eagles many times in my life and am always amazed by them. One summer I went with friends through the Inside Passage off Vancouver Island, and we watched eagles from the boat as they swooped down to catch fish out of the water. What amazing hunters/"fisherbirds" they are.

Last fall I traveled to the Skagit River on a stormy day to take pictures of eagles. They are so majestic and awe-inspiring. One of the phenomenons I have had with eagles is that at various times they have come out of nowhere and flown over my head! One time, exhausted and recovering from a total breakdown, crying out to God for strength, I had an eagle fly right over my head at the exact time I was asking for strength. I heard my heart quote a familiar verse: "...those who (wait) hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles..." —Isaiah 40:31.

Because of these experiences, I prepared a seminar I call Eagle Flight, in which I share spiritual disciplines or health habits that help us fly with the eagles. On this site, all the transcripts of my messages are found in the same section: Eagle Flight. Just as eagles are fascinating, I want to do what I can to show how fascinating Scripture is.

Obviously I am not the only person curious about and fascinated by eagles. Agur was amazed by eagles— Prov. 30:18: 18] *"There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: (the first of the four is) 19] the way of an eagle in the sky..."*
The eagle amazed Agur and was often the symbol of vigor and vitality.

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David saw the eagle as a symbol of strength, too. He says in Psalm 103:2, "*Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits*" (David then lists several things and concludes with)... (5) "*who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*"

With those examples in mind, I want us to see that eagles are not only fascinating, amazing and symbolic of strength, but really do help us to see ourselves.

How Eagles Reflect Our Spiritual Journey—how we can soar with eagles

Let begin with where eagles live and how they raise their young. What can we learn about our spiritual journey by viewing the eagle's nest?

The Eagle's Nest

The eagle's nest shows us how we will grow into maturity. It's not only a nursery for the young, it's their school, too—Job 39:27-28; Deut. 32:11; Ex. 19:4.

The location of the nest

Location is very important to the eagle and its young. If possible, eagles build their nests on the face of cliffs. They don't build a nest in a tree unless they absolutely have to, because a nest in a tree can be easily accessed. They don't build it on the top of the cliff, either, because on the top of a cliff it can be violated, too. Eagles build their nests in

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some inaccessible place.

The building of the nest

The nest is built with consummate skill—not using little twigs, but great branches woven together in an immensely skillful way. If somehow an eagle's nest is loosed from its moorings and falls, it rarely comes apart. In fact, eagles' nests are so big, they have weighed in at half a ton! They're comfortable, too. Their centers are carefully lined with feathers and leaves, and the eggs are placed there. When they hatch, the mother begins the process of feeding the babies.

It is interesting to me that this whole process does not escape God.

The Bible knows about the nest—Job 39:27-28.

27] "Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high? 28] He dwells on a cliff and stays there at night; a rocky crag is his stronghold. 29] From there he seeks out his food; his eyes detect it from afar. (It's in the nest.) 30] His young ones feast on blood..."

The gathering of food and the nest

Now it's the task of the mother to feed the little eagles. I don't know why it's the mother's job, but it is. The mother eagle goes out and finds the food; flies back to the nest; stands on the edge; and drops the food systematically into the gaping mouths of the little eaglets.

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It's an unending process as over and over again she flies out and flies back.

This has been carefully researched; while the mother eagle is out "shopping," researchers have rearranged the little eagles in the nest. The mother, however, has an absolutely unerring sense—she knows exactly which babies have been fed and which have not, and she never misses.

The lessons taught in the nest

What a beautiful scene from nature about how the Lord provides not only for the birds of the air, but takes care of us (see Matt. 6:26-27). The scene in the nest should describe our spiritual lives only initially, not forever, however. Things don't go on like this forever, because the nest is not only a place of feeding; it is also a school of sorts.

Let me show you "the ways of an eagle" in the nest, and give you a picture of our lives as well. After the eaglets get to a certain size, or maturity, everything changes! One day the mother eagle comes back from being gone, but this time there's no food in her beak, and she doesn't land on the edge of the nest. Instead, she hovers over the nest.

You may not know this, but an eagle can do almost what a hummingbird can do. Even though they are great birds, they can remain almost motionless in midair with those great wings just undulating in the breeze. They do this about three feet above the nest. I'm sure if little eagles could talk to one another—and maybe they can—one would certainly say, "My, what strong wings Mommy has."

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Why does the mother do this? She is demonstrating that those curious appendages on the babies' backs have a useful function. Eagles, of course, were meant to fly, but they don't know that. If we take an eagle and separate it at birth from its parents, it will never learn to fly. It will just grovel around in the dirt like a chicken. It might even look up and see eagles soaring overhead and never guess that it was meant to soar in the heavens.

Eagles have to be taught, and that's the mother's job. So first she just demonstrates.

The next thing she does is come down into the nest and surprise her young. One can imagine how warm it must normally be for the little eagles to snuggle with their mother and be enshrouded with her feathers, but this time she puts her head up against one of the little ones, and pushes that little one closer and closer to the edge of the nest. ("Hey mom, mom, what are you doing?")

All at once she pushes the little one out of the nest, and the eaglet falls down the face of the cliff, surely to be destroyed. But not so! In a flash the great mother eagle flies down, catches the little one on her back, and flies up and deposits it in the nest. ("Whew! Mom, that must have been an accident.") But it wasn't an accident. The mother bird pushes the little one out again, and again, over and over.

Why would a mother do that to her young? Does she hate the little one? Not at all. It's just that those little birds were made to fly, and they don't know it, so she is going to push them out of the nest. She never lets them hit bottom, but she does let them fall, because they have to learn something they don't know.

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The next time the mother bird comes back she decides to clean house, and so she stands on the edge of the nest. The first things to go are the feathers inside; she drops them over the edge. Then the leaves go over the edge—heave ho! While this is going on, she's not very talkative, either. ("Mom, what are you doing?") She pays no attention. Since she built the house, she knows how to take it apart.

Next she decides to take the sticks out of the middle of the nest, and with her great strong beak and feet, she's able to break them off and stand them straight up. ("Mom, it's not comfortable in here anymore.") Then she takes certain key sticks out of the nest and throws them over the edge. ("What are you doing, Mom? You are wrecking my room.")

She seemingly pays no attention to the concerns of her young as she prepares to pull the nest apart, for she is determined that those little ones will fly, and she knows something they don't. She knows they will never fly as long as they remain in the nest.

Again, the Bible tells us all about these things. Deuteronomy 32:11 says, *"...like an eagle that stirs up its nest
(makes it uncomfortable)
and hovers over its young,
(showing them how to fly)
that spreads its wings to catch them
(as He pushes them out of the nest)
and carries them on its pinions..."*
so is the Lord God to His people.

God is out to mature us. Because we were made to fly, He will stir up our nest—our world. We weren't made to languish in the comfortable surroundings of our nest-like world. We're created in the image of God, made to fly and train our young to do the same. You and I were made to soar, but sometimes we simply don't know it or forget it, so there are times when God will push us out of the nest.

"Hey, God, what are You doing? I was enjoying the food You were feeding me. I just

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had to wait with my mouth open and You provided for my needs. What is happening now, Lord? I'm getting hungry. Surely You don't expect me to feed myself?"

Or maybe your eaglet experience is, "Hey, Lord, what are You doing? I feel like I am falling—like everything in my life is heading for disaster. Surely You don't expect me to fall! How could I possibly be responsible to help others and be responsible for my own actions. You don't want me to fly, do You?"

If you've known the Lord for very long, you've had that experience. I suspect you've been pushed out of the nest more than once. All of the security you had seems to be gone, and then someone else expects you to feed *them* when you have developed a liking to being fed. I wonder if believers realize what they are saying when they complain they are not being fed anymore and have to go to another church. Those statements testify to a person's immaturity, not their lack of feeding! They also are indications that the Lord is expecting more of them. He has put them in circumstances where once-a-week feedings are no longer sufficient, and they need to learn to fly so they can feed themselves!

If at any time we aren't getting enough to eat—at this church, or a college ministry, or a small group—then we need to acknowledge we are going through a growing spurt and require more food because of the things God has in mind for us to do. It's not a time to look for another mother eagle; it's time to leave our comfortable eaglet lifestyle and fly!

Perhaps right now you are in trouble and attribute the stirring of the nest to Satan's activity. Certainly that is often the case, because Satan is a predator. (By the way, you'll know it is him because of the destructive, or guilt-producing ways he tries to hurt you.)

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We must understand, however, that sometimes the trouble and pain we are experiencing is because God is after us. He's determined. He wants us to fly.

I want to say as clearly as I can, there are times when even God will destroy nests when we put our confidence utterly in the little securities we build around ourselves. I know that to be true. I have been thrown off a precipice into a freefall many times; and sometimes God has swooped down at the last minute to rescue me. Other times in my spiritual life I had to exercise faith and learn to fly.

We work so hard to get our lives just the way we want them, but God knows that our comfortable lives can be an anchor to our souls. We're not able to fly, we're not feeding ourselves, and we're unable to get out of our nests. We are so dependent on our possessions and support systems that there are times when God is prepared to destroy our nest. In those times we may think we've been abandoned by God, because we wonder where He is. We feel ourselves falling and think maybe He doesn't care for us anymore. ("Why is this happening to me? Everything was going so well!")

Sometimes, the Lord simply wants us to discover that underneath are His wings, His everlasting arms! Other times, however, He wants us to learn that our security is

- not in our bank accounts
- not in our jobs
- not in our homes or possessions
- not in our nation,
- not in our health

but in the Lord God alone.

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If you know the Old Testament story of the Exodus, you know this is what God did with Israel. He brought them into the desert where He fed them and clothed them. Do you remember what God said to Israel when He brought them to Mount Sinai? He said, *"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself"*
—Exodus 19:4.

Soon after that He kicked them out of the nest and wanted them to fly. He wanted Israel to go into the Promised Land. Sadly, they refused to fly, and as a result wandered in the desert 40 years. That was not God's intention for them, nor is it for us. We need to get out of the nest and try our wings!

The Eagle's Flight

The eagle's flight teaches us how to soar and not just fly; to catch the wind of the Spirit so we can have the strength to soar. Isaiah 40:30-31—*"Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31] but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles..."*
(See: 1 Tim. 4:2; John 5:19; Matt. 11:30.)

Actually, referring to eagles *flying* isn't the most accurate description of how an eagle gets into the sky. In reality, eagles don't fly like other birds do. Oh, they flap their wings from time to time, but that's preparatory to what they do best. If you've ever seen an eagle perched on a tree or a rock, it looks as though every muscle in its body is taut, and it is ready to fly—but it might sit there for hours.

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Last year as I was watching the eagles, I got impatient. I whistled, trying to get an eagle to fly. It didn't move! You see, I didn't know then what I know now... that an eagle has an inborn ability to sense the motion of air currents. An eagle often won't budge until the right breeze comes along. When it does, the eagle just lets go. Yes, it flaps its wings, but mostly the eagle just lets go, and is borne aloft on the wings of the wind.

Birds don't like storms, but eagles love storms because it just forces them higher and higher. I read this week of an incident when the late Steve McQueen flew a glider in the Rockies. When he hit a thermal (an updraft), he decided to ride it as high as he could. He got somewhere around 14 to 15,000 feet, very high for a glider. When he looked out the window, he remembered,

"You'll never guess. I saw eagles! They had the ability to lock their wings. It looked like they were asleep; they were just riding the wind so effortlessly." Quoted in *Life On Wings* by Terry Fullam

That is a wonderful description of what God has in mind for us. *"...those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will SOAR on wings like eagles..."*

In the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, the word for wind is *rawach*

, the same word used for "spirit." The Spirit of God is called the *rawach*

of God. It's also true in the New Testament.

Pneuma

is the word for "wind" and also for "spirit." In Latin, *spiritus*

is translated "wind" or "breath" or "spirit."

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These words for soar and spirit are pointing us to a different kind of Christian life than many of us experience. We're talking about lives of service in which people are ready to serve God because they've made up their minds on that subject. We don't have to ask them every day, "Are you going to serve God today?" They are ready—"*...in season and out of season*"
—1 Timothy 4:2.

The challenge of being "eagle Christians" is learning to wait on the Lord, until we catch the wind of the Spirit. Eagle believers are those who seek to find out where God is going, and then go with Him. They don't sense fighting against the wind currents; they find out what God's doing and enter into it. Jesus modeled this for us when He said in John 5:19—"*I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.*"

Never acting independently, never moving on His own, Jesus saw what God was doing and moved with it. That's what "eagle Christians" do: develop an ability to sense the motion of the Spirit and refuse to move until they know what God is doing. Oh, we know the opposite of an "eagle Christian," because most of us have been a part of another kind of Christianity many times in our lives.

It's when we joined the cult of the white knuckles. As members of this cult, we work for God. We don't serve, we just work for Him. We can tell we have joined this cult because of our disposition. We are constantly tired, and sometimes our health breaks down. I am learning there is a better way.

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The simple call is to mimic the eagles, wait on the Lord and the wind of the Spirit will renew our strength so we can "...soar on wings like eagles..."

The Eagle's Eyes

Their eyes encourage *us* to develop eyes to see what others cannot—Job 39:27-29; Heb. 11:13.

An eagle can see what other birds do not see. They can see a tiny lizard on a rock at a thousand feet. They can see the movement of a fish under water. The Bible understands this and talks about it in the passage we looked at in Job 39:

27-29—"*Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high? 28] He dwells on a cliff and stays there at night; a rocky crag is his stronghold. 29] From there he seeks out his food; his eyes detect it from afar.*"

Again, the application we're focusing on leads to a different kind of Christian life. If we "soar with the eagles," our lives will not mesh with the standards or perceptions of our day. Our lives, in fact, will be a challenge to the values of society around us, and people won't understand our decisions or our actions:

- "You mean you're going to give up your career and go serve somewhere?"
- "You mean you like to go to church services and enjoy reading your Bible?"

Many will not understand your values. They will wonder what has come over you since many of the things that preoccupied you for so long are now of lesser value. The hymn,

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"Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus," says it well: "And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace."

Hebrews 11:13 describes the people of vision as those who saw something from afar—*"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth."*

Eagle eyes see things in the distance and in the present—because they see what Jesus sees—Matt 9:35. They can see the horror of the World Trade Center bombings and be deeply touched by what they see. The eagle eyes of a mature believer will view the scare caused by the Anthrax terrorism and be concerned and prayerful about those affected.

But these eyes will see beyond the senseless tragedy, too. They will see by eyes of faith that God can work in the midst of these evil circumstances and somehow bring some benefit to us. They are enlightened by the Scripture and not only feel the Spirit of God, but can see God working in the present and future. They are undeterred by obstacles or frightening situations, but are resolute in seeing the good news of God's grace proclaimed—in the worst of times.

They want their friends and family to be ready for anything that might happen in this

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country and this world. They also see beyond their country and see the whole world and its needs.

The Eagle's Death

The eagle reminds us to be ready to face the Son in our death—Acts 7:55-56. The eagle's death is a beautiful thing, but it's not easy to explain. Eagles seem to have a premonition when it comes time to die; they leave their nests and fly to a rock—always a rock. They'll fasten their talons on the front of the rock, look straight into the rising or setting sun, and die—feet on a rock looking straight into the sun.

As most of you know, I saw an "eagle" die recently. He was my father. He had certainly done his work as an eagle with me. When I was 18 I was expected to leave, or begin to contribute to the household. The nest was made very uncomfortable. It was time to fly; and I was going over the side of the nest soon. Oh, he picked me up a couple of times, but it was a fast-paced flying school. I was not coddled, but he did make sure I was prepared to soar!

So I am thankful for the nest, and in retrospect, for the push as well. When his time had come to die he faced it like an eagle—independent, distant, a little defiant, but focused. I gave him a little help, but he didn't resist, because he knew it was his time to face the Son. He looked right into the Lord's face and was ready to go. At the funeral, the pastor didn't gloss over my dad's ornery side. He said my dad was the only guy he knew who you could hate and love at the same time. How's that for an epitaph?

So I've seen an eagle die—strengths and weaknesses both obvious. But there was no fear, because his feet were firmly planted on the rock of Christ Jesus. He was looking straight into the Son of Righteousness.

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Obviously death is very mysterious; who can understand it? Sometimes it robs a person in the prime of life. Sometimes people die after an agonizing illness that just hangs on and on. Who can completely explain the "why" of death and the way of death? I do know this, however; there's a better way to die. God wants us to be able to look Him straight in the face. With confidence we are ready to meet Him.

That leads to the last thing I want to point you to in this reflection on eagles.

The Eagle's Birth

To grow up to be an eagle, you have to be *born* an eagle. If we are ever going to be a Christian, we have to be a reborn one—John 1:12-13. (That is such a simple thought; it is almost embarrassing to say.) The New Testament makes it clear that the kind of life we inherit from our parents—wonderful or awful as they may be—can never lead to eternal life.

Jesus, talking to a religious leader by the name of Nicodemus, said "you must be born again or else you cannot understand or enter the kingdom of God." A new birth was declared by Jesus to be necessary to enter the Kingdom of God. In John 1:12-13, John puts it this way: *"...to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—13] children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."*

This makes it clear, we have to receive our salvation in order to experience it. There is an act of appropriation. Being born a child of God is presented in the Bible as a gift—it has to be responded to. We must receive it; it is never thrust upon us. If we reach out to receive and believe in Jesus Christ, then we are given the right to become a child of God.

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If you have not received Jesus by a direct act of your will, I want to encourage you to receive the gift of eternal life and become a child of God!.

With the eagle's nest, flight, eyes, death and birth in mind, here is my prayer for you...

- My prayer is that you will remember that if you're ever going to become a Christian, you have to be a "born" one.
- My prayer is that you'll understand something about the ways of God in caring for you and rearing you.
- And you'll understand in those dark moments when you seem to be falling, or your nest comes apart, that it's God's purpose only that you may soar.
- I pray that you will understand how to move on the wings of the Spirit, so that your efforts may last and you will not grow weary.
- I'm going to pray that you will be able to see as an eagle sees—not just discouragement, not just problems, but opportunities—that God will give you the opportunity to see His hand at work in this troubled world about us.
- And when it's time to die, I pray that He will grant to each one of us an abundant entrance into His Kingdom.

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